



## **Procedure: Guidelines for a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program**

Functional Area: II Nutrition Services/Breastfeeding

Section: A 7

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Citation: Loving Support© Model for Peer Counseling

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### **Purpose**

To provide guidelines for the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program.

### **Definition of a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor**

A Breastfeeding Peer Counselor is a mother who:

- Has breastfed one or more infants
- Has successfully completed a breastfeeding peer counselor training program, and
- Is competent to provide breastfeeding advice and information to WIC clients

Peer counselors are women in the community with personal breastfeeding experience who provide information and support to WIC mothers. Peer Counselors help prevent and manage common breastfeeding concerns and offer mother-to-mother support and encouragement through the breastfeeding experience.

### **Role of a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor**

The role of a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor includes:

- Working within their scope of practice and job description.
- Providing guidance and support and up-to-date information on breastfeeding to interested pregnant and lactating clients.
- Being familiar with common problems encountered by breastfeeding women.
- Being trained to anticipate problems to help prevent their occurrence.
- Referring more difficult problems to a trained WIC Breastfeeding Specialist.

### **WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Training Program**

WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselors must successfully complete a required training program prior to working as a peer counselor. The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor training program includes:

- Becoming familiar with the philosophy and mission of WIC.
- Successful completion of the state approved *Loving Support© Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together* curriculum.
- Local agency specific policies and procedures
- Peer counselors may participate in observational learning experiences such as clinic settings or home visits with visiting nurses, breastfeeding classes, as specified by local agency.

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**WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Training Program (cont.)**

The State Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator is available to assist local agencies with the training program.

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**Supervision and Monitoring of Peer Counselors**

Breastfeeding Peer Counselors are supervised by the Local Agency Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Supervisor.

The supervisor must assure that the peer counselor is operating within her role. Each peer counselor should be observed working with clients before working on her own, and should be observed on a regular basis thereafter.

- Supervisor should establish performance and behavior standards.
  - Supervisors should provide ongoing communication, guidance and training for peer counselors.
  - Procedures for monitoring of peer counselors should include phone calls with peer counselors, regular review of client contact logs, and spot checks of WIC client contacts.
  - The supervisor should review the peer counselors' written documentation of client contacts to be certain the peer counselor is making referrals when needed.
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**Confidentiality Agreement**

The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, through the delivery of health services, receives personal and health related information regarding the clients they serve.

- The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor will maintain client confidentiality.
  - Information obtained by the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor may not be shared without the client's consent, except as authorized or required by law or as permitted by department or WIC program policy.
  - Breastfeeding Peer Counselors will sign a Confidentiality Agreement.
  - A sample confidentiality agreement is available from the State WIC office.
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**Compensation of Peer Counselors**

Research shows that paying peer counselors is a key factor in successful sustainable peer counselor programs. Advantages of paid peer counselors include the ability to :

- Attract qualified candidates
- Communicate the value and role of the position
- Improve retention of experienced peer counselors
- Legitimize the role of peer counselors within the WIC breastfeeding program and system.

Peer counselors should be paid on a scale comparable to the hourly rate of WIC clerks and other non-professional staff members. Peer counselors should be reimbursed for travel, long distance phone charges, training, and continuing education.

A sample WIC breastfeeding peer counselor contract is available from the State WIC Office.

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**Referral Protocols for Referring a WIC Client to a Peer Counselor**

- Local agency staff may refer pregnant or breastfeeding clients to a peer counselor using the peer counselor referral form.
  - Referral to a peer counselor should also be documented in the WIC computer system using “Referral To” code number 1.
  - The Peer Counselor Supervisor will assign clients to each peer counselor. The peer counselor will initiate contact with the client according to local agency procedure.
  - Local agency procedure should indicate the number of contacts that will be attempted and at what time during the pregnancy or breastfeeding experience.
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**Documentation of Client Contacts**

Documenting all client contacts is an integral part of the peer counselors’ job. Documentation provides a:

- Record of the advice given
- Method to refer problems to appropriate WIC staff
- Measurement for effectiveness
- Justification for paying peer counselors for services provided

Peer counselors should keep a contact log for each client they are following, documenting all contacts, information covered, and referrals made.

- Peer counselors should file the contact logs according to local agency procedures.

A sample peer counselor client contact log is available from the State WIC office.

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**Recommended Contact Frequency**

Peer counselors will make contact with pregnant and breastfeeding clients.

- Research shows higher breastfeeding rates when peer counselors initiate contacts early in pregnancy and make monthly contacts, with more frequent contacts as the due date approaches

WIC clients should be contacted based on the recommended contact schedule:

Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly</li><li>• More frequently as due date nears – such as every 1-2 weeks.</li></ul>
Early Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every 2-3 days during first week</li><li>• Within 24 hours if problems occur</li><li>• Weekly the rest of the month</li></ul>
1-3 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly</li><li>• Before returning to work/school</li></ul>
3-6 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly</li></ul>
6-12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly</li></ul>

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**Referral Protocols for  
Peer Counselors  
Referring a Client to  
Breastfeeding Expert**

The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor will refer clients with medical issues beyond their scope of practice to the Peer Counselor Supervisor or other Local Agency Breastfeeding Expert.

WIC Breastfeeding Experts are designated staff members whom peer counselors can turn to with questions, and refer mothers who are having breastfeeding difficulties beyond the “basics” which are outside the peer counselors practice parameters.

Referral sources can include the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Supervisor, Local Agency Breastfeeding Coordinator, WIC State Breastfeeding Coordinator, or other local agency staff with advanced training in breastfeeding support.

Peer Counselors may also refer clients to a medical provider, or other breastfeeding resources in the community (Breastfeeding Help Line, Hospital Lactation Consultants, etc).

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**Local Agency  
Requirements for Peer  
Counselor Program  
Implementation**

Local Agencies desiring to implement a breastfeeding peer counselor program must complete a needs assessment and submit a request to the State WIC Director.

- The State WIC Director and State Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator will review the request and assist local agencies in working through their specific local agency concerns.

Prior to implementation of a breastfeeding peer counselor program – the local agency director and peer counselor supervisor must complete the *Loving Support® Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together – For WIC Managers* training with the State WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator.

This training will provide detailed information on management considerations, including:

- Management costs, peer counseling program costs, local agency budget and allowable costs.
  - Personnel options, recruiting and hiring, scope of practice, training options, supervision and monitoring and local agency policies.
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**Training for Local  
Agency WIC Staff**

Basic breastfeeding training should be offered to all Local Agency WIC staff. Everyone will have the advantage of the same evidence based information.

All staff in the local clinics should be provided an orientation on the peer counseling program so they can learn more about why peer counseling is being implemented at their clinic, what the peer counselors will be doing, and what the role of staff may be in assuring success of the program.

- A power-point presentation for local agency staff, *Loving Support® Through Peer Counseling: Making a Difference for WIC Families* is available from the State Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator.
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**Promotion of the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program**

Local Agency staff will promote the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program with WIC Clients.

- Promotion to clients is important to increase client awareness of the availability and role of the Breastfeeding Peer Counselors.
- WIC clinic staff must continue to give accurate and positive information about breastfeeding, not delegate all counseling to the peer counselors.

The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program should also be promoted to community resources such as hospitals, health care providers, other public health programs, and other community programs that serve similar population groups.

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**Support of Local Agencies with Peer Counselor Programs**

The State Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator will maintain regular contact with Local Agency Peer Counselor Supervisors to provide support and ongoing technical assistance.

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## Loving Support® Model for a Successful PEER COUNSELING PROGRAM



### ADEQUATE PROGRAM SUPPORT FROM STATE AND LOCAL MANAGEMENT

- Appropriate Definition of a Peer Counselor
  - Paraprofessional\*
  - Recruited and hired from target population
  - Available to WIC clients outside usual clinic hours and outside the WIC clinic environment
- Designated breastfeeding peer counseling program managers and/or coordinators at State and/or local level
- Defined job parameters and job descriptions for peer counselors
- Adequate compensation and reimbursement of peer counselors
- Training of appropriate WIC State/local peer counseling management and clinic staff (including use of "Loving Support® Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together – For WIC Managers" and "Loving Support® Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together – For Peer Counselors" training curricula and PowerPoint® presentations)
- Establishment of standardized breastfeeding peer counseling program policies and procedures at the State and local level as part of Agency nutrition education plan
- Adequate supervision and monitoring of peer counselors
- Establishment of community partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of a WIC peer counseling program

### ADEQUATE PROGRAM SUPPORT OF PEER COUNSELORS

- Adequate training and continuing education of peer counselors (including use of "Loving Support® through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together – For Peer Counselors" training curriculum)
- Timely access to breastfeeding coordinators and other lactation experts for assistance with problems outside of peer counselor scope of practice
- Regular, systematic contact with supervisor
- Participation in clinic staff meetings and breastfeeding inservices as part of the WIC team
- Opportunities to meet regularly with other peer counselors

*\*Those without extended professional training in health, nutrition, or the clinical management of breastfeeding who are selected from the group to be trained and are trained and given ongoing supervision to provide a basic service or function. Paraprofessionals provide specific tasks within a defined scope of practice. They assist professionally, but are not licensed or are identified as healthcare, nutrition, or lactation consultant professionals.*